



Racial and Ethnic Differences in Health in North Carolina

A Special Report from the Center for Health Informatics and Statistics
and Office of Minority Health

North Carolina Division of Public Health
November 2000

Executive Summary

The purpose of this study is to document health differences among the major racial and ethnic groups in North Carolina. Race is considered as a marker of health problems not as a risk factor or cause. Describing racial and ethnic differences in health allows targeting of resources and health improvement programs toward populations most in need.

This report presents descriptive statistics by race and ethnicity for Whites, African Americans, American Indians, Asians, and Hispanics/Latinos. The following topics are included: population, risk factors among adults, deaths, cancer incidence, live births, risk factors around the time of pregnancy, and infant deaths. There are some potentially serious problems in the reporting of health data for the smaller minority groups. Health events for these groups are likely to be under-reported and the population data used for the denominators of rates may be inaccurate.

The results of this study show generally poorer health among African Americans and American Indians in North Carolina, compared to Whites, across a variety of measures. For American Indians, however, there is concern about the accuracy of the reporting of race on health records, so that the published statistics may substantially underestimate the level of health problems among American Indians. This underreporting is also likely an issue for Hispanic ethnicity. The measures of health problems for Hispanics are generally much lower than those for Whites, especially for chronic diseases. However, the very young age of the Hispanic/Latino population in North Carolina, the "healthy migrant effect," and other factors may also contribute to low rates for many of the causes of death and for other health problems in this group.

Figures 1, 2, and 3 show areas where there are large disparities in the health indicators for African Americans, American Indians, and Hispanics/

Latinos, compared to Whites. These charts summarize the data presented in the tables of the main report. The ratio of the measure for the minority group to the measure for Whites is shown in these figures if it is greater than 1.5. African Americans exhibit a large number of substantial health disparities (Figure 1). American Indians have elevated rates of death from diabetes, motor vehicle injury, and homicide, as well as higher rates of smoking during pregnancy, late or no prenatal care, and infant mortality (Figure 2). Hispanics have substantially higher rates of death from motor vehicle injury, homicide, and AIDS, and a higher rate of late or no prenatal care (Figure 3). Health indicators for Asians in North Carolina are much better than those for Whites in almost every case. One exception is that Asians have a higher percentage of births where the prenatal care was begun after the first trimester (ratio = 1.6).

The results presented in this report emphasize areas where minority groups have worse health problems than Whites. Notable areas where minority groups are better off than Whites in North Carolina are: smoking is lower among African Americans – in the general population of adults and particularly during pregnancy, chronic lung disease and suicide death rates are lower among African Americans, the percentages for smoking during pregnancy and for low birthweight are lower among Hispanics/Latinos, and the infant mortality rate is lower among Hispanic/Latino births.

It is hoped that the information presented in this report will inform North Carolina citizens about racial and ethnic disparities in health, and assist in the formulation of policies and programs in North Carolina to reduce these disparities.

For a copy of the full report on *Racial and Ethnic Differences in Health in North Carolina*, contact the Center for Health Informatics and Statistics at (919) 733-4728 or go to the Center Web site at <http://www.schs.state.nc.us/SCHS/pubs/>